

The real beginning of the various Christian research organisations which flourished across the Western world at the end of the 20th century and early 21st century was in the 1960s, a little behind the secular market research world which had its tentative start in the 1930s, but only really got under way in the 1950s after the War ended.

Christian research organisations started through a manager in an aeronautical engineering company in Los Angeles in the late 1940s, who began to feel the Lord calling him into full-time service in the early 1960s. Accordingly Edward Dayton, always abbreviated to Ed, attended Fuller Theological Seminary and then began to ask questions such as, “Who is applying management theory and practice to Christian organisations?”

Given the opportunity by his friend Ted Engstrom, the long-serving Vice President of World Vision (WV), to take a room in his Los Angeles office, Ed did so, and over the course of the next year (1967) began an organisation called Missions Advanced Research and Communications Centre (abbreviated to MARC, with one C, not two, at the end). Over the next few years, under Ed's influence, MARC expanded. He led it to develop in three broad areas:

- He began to research the Christian populations of many countries, initially those in which World Vision was working, updating and extending the work previously done by Sir Kenneth Grubb and others published in the *World Christian Handbook* in 1957, 1962 and 1968;
- He began suggesting that mission agencies move away from the old “comity” arrangement whereby one particular mission would be primarily responsible for evangelism and Christian community work in a given area or country, to the concept of working with particular groups of people;
- He began helping Christian organisations with management theory and ran courses on subjects like Time Management.

MARC had a stand at the Lausanne '74 Congress, inaugurated by Billy Graham, showing a population “clock” and how many people were becoming Christians as each minute passed, and how fast the world population was increasing. Ed also helped launch other MARCs, such as MARC Australia and MARC Canada. In 1978 WV declared a global strategy for its work and thereafter called itself World Vision International. This meant starting offices elsewhere, including Europe. Ed suggested that along with that, as part of it, there should be a MARC Europe. The newly appointed Director of WV Europe, James Tysoe, said his first priority was to start fundraising offices in Europe (starting in Britain, Finland, Germany and Switzerland for example) and MARC Europe could come later.

The work of MARC Europe

MARC Europe began in April 1983 when Peter Brierley, an ex-Cabinet Office statistician who was then a director in the British and Foreign Bible Society, was put in charge. He had met Ed in 1972 when Ed visited the UK and wanted to discuss mission statistics with someone. As Peter had just completed a detailed missions survey for the Evangelical Missionary Alliance, he was asked to meet him, and he and his wife entertained Ed and his daughter Jill in their home one evening.

MARC Europe followed Ed's lead in two areas – undertaking national research (as well as many dozens of surveys of local churches and Christian agencies), and teaching Christian management. The last of these was mainly through a brilliant teacher, former Head of Management Training at Shell, Dr David Cormack, who travelled all over the UK and many places in Europe. Over the 10 years of its existence, MARC Europe gave management help to over 20,000 Christian leaders. It also began publishing Christian management books under the wonderful enthusiasm of energetic Tony Collins, initiator of the Monarch publishing company and then Editor-at-Large of LionHudson. For a time MARC Europe was the 15th largest Christian publisher in the UK but, very sadly, shortage of WV funds in 1987 meant the subsidy to MARC Europe from WV was severely curtailed and there were a number of redundancies that year, including the publishing department.

Peter had undertaken an English Church Census in 1979 by going to every church in the land asking for membership and attendance details, the latter broken down by age-group and gender, published by the Bible Society as *Prospects for the Eighties* in two separate booklets. MARC Europe repeated this study in 1989, with a very thorough listing of virtually all of the addresses of England's 38,000 churches, and had an incredible 70% response rate to this second English Church Census. Two books were published early in 1991 about the results – ‘*Christian*’ *England* which gave the commentary (with two Forewords, one by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rt Rev George Carey, and the other by Sir John Boreham, who became the Head of the Government Statistical Service) and *Prospects for the Nineties* which gave the detailed county and denominational tables. At that stage, Church Censuses had also been undertaken across both the Welsh churches (in 1982) and the Scottish churches (in 1984). MARC Europe also began a quarterly bulletin called *LandMARC* in 1986.

The 1989 Census showed that a huge number of teenagers had stopped attending church, across all denominations. A meeting of all the major youth organisations was held to think through the issue and a survey was commissioned to try and find out why so many had left. The results were published in the book *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers*, and basically helped to encourage churches to employ Youth Workers, academic courses on which were beginning in some colleges in the late 1980s. Why had teenagers left? Church was “boring” and “not relevant.”

In addition to all its research work, MARC Europe continued the biennial publication of the *UK Christian Handbook* (UKCH) which Peter had started in booklet form back in 1972. It became a substantial volume with church statistics

forming an integral part of it as well as listing all the then known Christian organisations and societies based or working in the UK, some 4,000 in 1988. Apart from books giving research results, the *UKCH* was the only book MARC Europe continued to publish. However, Peter was asked to write a book on future thinking and planning and *Vision Building* was the result, published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1989, the first of some 16 books he was to write. In 1990 MARC Europe moved its offices in south London, and bought a small four room block in Eltham which it also called "Vision Building," symbolising precisely what it saw as its mission.

In all of this, MARC Europe's work paralleled in some ways what was happening with the fledgling Christian Research Association in Australia. However, the aims of the two organisations were slightly different as MARC Europe wanted to help Christian leaders make better strategic decisions. In order to make such decisions, data on the Christian scene was important, although it was recognised that numbers do not make the decisions, simply influence them. MARC Europe wanted to supply the necessary researched information to aid that process.

Ed Dayton continued to be associated with MARC Europe, visiting every time he was travelling in Europe. Ed became the Chair of the Lausanne Theology and Strategy Working Group as, after the 1974 Congress, Lausanne continued as an organisation, initially called the Lausanne Committee. The Working group began appointing a number of Associates across the world to focus Christian thinking and activity on particular topics. In 1984, Peter became the Research Associate. Ed Dayton became responsible for organising the second Lausanne Congress, held in Manila, Philippines, in 1989, which Peter also attended.

In a typical African or Indian rural situation, after 10 years World Vision will move to another village, providing sponsorship for many of its children and using some of that sponsorship money to build a new classroom, community hall, provide a water pump – whatever the village elders requested. In that way, more children and communities are helped. It applied this same 10 year move process to MARC Europe so that after its initial 10 years World Vision no longer continued its subsidy and therefore MARC Europe was no longer part of WV Europe.

The work of Christian Research

That meant that MARC Europe had to close down and its team take redundancy. Peter wished to continue publishing the *UKCH*, however, and so continued with a new charity (with exactly the same aims as MARC Europe) called the Christian Research Association (CRA, although it speedily became known just as Christian Research). He had become tired of being addressed as Mr Mark Europe! With some funds left over from MARC Europe just 3 staff were retained in addition to himself.

Statistical Bulletin. It was tough going financially at the beginning, but a letter sent to all 38,000 church leaders advising them of the change and inviting them to join the new Christian Research organisation as a member produced a 4% response, sufficient for initial viability. Members would receive the regular bulletin *Quadrant*, produced in the same style as *LandMARC*, which was now discontinued. Christian Research's programme of research projects also continued, as did the production of the *UKCH*.

Training. Although David Cormack and his successor Bryn Hughes had left, Peter continued to take some seminars himself, especially one on vision building and another on time management which became very popular, based on his new book *Priorities, Planning and Paperwork*. Christian Research also continued to organise training Conferences for Archdeacons, holding a National Conference one year and a New Archdeacons' Conference the next. It also began to organise Senior Leaders' Conferences every 4 years – when Bishops, Chairmen, Moderators, Commanders and others of like level across the different denominations could meet and discuss issues of importance. One outstanding speaker was Archbishop (later Cardinal) Tom Winning who spoke in 1996 on his "25 year strategy to reach the people of Glasgow."

UK Christian Handbook. A problem arose with the production of the 1996 edition of the *UK Christian Handbook* – it was getting too thick for economical binding! Two inches thick was about the maximum. So it was decided in future editions to split the content into two separate publications and make the page A4 size. The title *UK Christian Handbook* would continue with names and addresses (and much other information) of Christian organisations as before, but all the church statistics would be put in a new volume called *Religious Trends*, also to be published every two years or so, but on a different timetable from the *UKCH*. Altogether seven editions of *Religious Trends* were published during the 15 years Christian Research existed as an independent organisation (1993 to 2008).

Lausanne. During the 1990s, the work of Lausanne in England faded, although it continued in the other 3 constituent countries of the UK. In 1994 Peter was appointed Senior Associate of Research, helped to strengthen a resurgent English Committee, and served on the international Committee formed under the wise leadership of Rev Fergus MacDonald, then Director of the National Bible Society of Scotland (now the Scottish Bible Society). Through the appointment in 1998 of Rev Paul Cedar, the pastor of a Congregational megachurch in Los Angeles (which Ed Dayton attended), as International Chair, Lausanne International was rejuvenated (as Paul was able to access American funds). Peter found himself on the International Board for the next 6 years. He helped initiate the Lausanne Forum held in Thailand in 2004, out of which came the desire for a further Lausanne Congress, held in South Africa in 2010, at which Peter gave two seminars on global trends. In preparation for the 2004 Forum, Christian Research went to nearly 2000 senior world leaders (Bishops of all denominations and others at similar seniority), to ask their opinion about what topics should be discussed and the top 20 of these featured in the Forum programme.

International Conferences. In 1997 Christian Research organised an International Lausanne Conference for Researchers, which Philip Hughes of the Australian CRA attended. Peter and Philip met for the first time! There was also at that time a New Zealand CRA, but they were unable to send a representative. Subsequently in December 1998 Christian Research organised a Lausanne Conference on Nominalism, also held in the UK, attended by people of some 20 different nationalities, but also attended by Philip. Further International Lausanne Conferences for Researchers were held in 2001 and 2005, and 2008 (under the chairmanship of Philip Hughes) and subsequently in 2011, 2015 and 2018.

Deputy Director. In 1995, the work of Christian Research had expanded and its Board felt that an Assistant Director should be appointed. Heather Wraight, former Head of Radio Worldwide, part of WEC International, who had just completed her MTh at Edinburgh University, accepted the post. She became enormously influential in Christian Research's subsequent development, undertaking and helping with numerous research projects, speaking at training seminars (especially at one called *Know Yourself Know Your Team*, affectionately known as KYKYT or "Kick-it"!)). Heather concentrated on editing the *UKCH* (while Peter focussed on *Religious Trends*). She was promoted to Deputy Director and stayed until she retired in 2007, moving to York to be with her ageing parents. She also wrote two books while at Christian Research, one on women's ministry, *Eve's Glue*, and one on how churches once expected to close had flourished instead, called *Back from the Brink*. Heather also did the majority of the qualitative research work at Christian Research, leading Focus Groups literally all over the country.

Church Censuses. A further English Church Census was undertaken in 1998 (so that the results could be published in time for the new Millennium), although it was called the English Church Attendance Survey, as not everyone wanted a "Census" at that time as it was known that numbers attending church were dropping fairly drastically, especially with the loss of many young people. The results were published in the book *The Tide is Running Out*, with a Foreword by the then Archbishop of York, the Rt Rev David Hope. It revealed quite a grim picture, as the church in general, and especially the major denominations, had lost much ground during the 1990s, even if that decade had been called "The Decade of Evangelism." It proved, however, to be of great interest to church leaders, who wanted both to know the facts and to think through the challenges of what to do in the light of the results. Christian Research held a dozen regional seminars and, over the next couple of years, its leaders were asked to speak at scores of churches or groups of leaders.

Tweenagers. One of the findings of the 1998 study was another drastic drop in the number of young people, especially those aged 10 to 15, attending church across all denominations, a group which came to be called "Tweenagers." Again Christian Research called together a meeting of the leaders of the major youth organisations to explain the findings and to ask what should be done. As a consequence a major survey was commissioned by them to look into the relevant issues, which also was published, this time in a book called *Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers*. Again, part of the issue was boredom in church and irrelevance of it to their lives as they started secondary school, and also as young people faced challenge in the teaching of science. Churches began to employ Children's Workers as well as Youth Workers, and larger churches especially found the employment of professionals to do particular jobs was both helpful to the ministry and a factor encouraging more people to join them, so the practice spread into other areas, such as administrators and managers of projects. Christian Research was also asked to undertake many seminars on the topic of Tweenagers.

More Censuses. Two further Scottish Church Censuses were held in 1994 and 2002, and another in England in 2005, the results of which were published in *Pulling out of the Nosedive* (commentary) and *Religious Trends* No 6 (tables). Again there was great interest in the results and Peter was asked to present them to different groups on 60 different occasions. The Censuses focus on *attendance* and provide a very firm database. Half, exactly 50%, of churches completed the form in 2005, and half a million churchgoers indicated their age, gender, ethnicity broken down by denomination, churchmanship and Local Authority.

Consultancy work. Christian Research engaged in some detailed consultancy work, which included undertaking studies of churches within four Deaneries (a group of up to 10 or 15 individual Church of England parishes) in the Diocese of Rochester, funded by some of the Livery Companies in the City of London. These included holding a Census-type evaluation one Sunday across every church in a particular Deanery, but using a different questionnaire, called the *Congregational Attitudes and Beliefs Survey*. Reports were written and presented to each Deanery and its Synod, and the Diocesan Bishop, Rt Rev Michael Nazir-Ali. They showed a wide diversity of practice but a very real commitment to the church, especially in what used to be called "working class" parishes. All four of these Deanery evaluations were held in the years around the turn of the century.

Large projects. From time to time Christian Research was asked to undertake major surveys for a particular organisation or denomination. These included:

- The 1995 *Ansvar Survey of Social Behaviour* to help an insurance company known for insuring teetotal churchgoers how far they might relax their core principles.
- A 2000 survey for the Church of Scotland on *Ministry among Young People* to help the Parish Education Dept get a better idea of trends and needs. The survey showed the value of grants being given to churches to enable them to install gym equipment in their church halls which young people greatly appreciated.

- Another large survey, or more correctly surveys, was undertaken for Scripture Union (SU) across the turn of the new century looking at every Bible Reading Aid they published for young people and seeking to know the strengths and weaknesses of each one. These were then faithfully transferred into new designs and formats. Another book came out of this study, published by SU, called *Steps to the Future*, and looked at issues facing the church in the new Millennium.
- A 2002 survey for the Salvation Army looking at why churches grow, and where new churches could best be started. This was a fascinating study comparing churches known to have grown with churches known to have declined (from the 1998 Census) and seeing which factors were significantly different. It was found that the key difference was that most growing churches had a leader who in Belbin terms was called a "Shaper", an outgoing dynamic person with a high need for achievement. The results were published in a booklet called *Leadership, Vision and Growing Churches* and 15,000 copies were printed and distributed.
- A 2005 survey in Britain for the American Josh McDowell who was very concerned at the increasing rise of sexual expression among churchgoing teenagers. How far had they gone? This was a very personal survey asked with great care but showing just how far the sexuality issue had seeped into churchgoing young people, alienating them from traditional church teaching (or lack of it!) and from the church itself.

Work continues. In its 15 years as an independent agency, Christian Research undertook 150 different research projects, and it was frequently asked for information about church life from the Press, church leaders (and not just in the UK!), academics, researchers, and so on. In the early years of the 21st century it experimented with further seminars, continued to publish *Quadrant*, now every two months, as well as the *UKCH* and *Religious Trends*. A successful advertising agency, Cornerstone, based in Plymouth, had managed to pull in sufficient advertising to make the *UKCH* financially viable, which was hugely important for its survival. Our unpublished motto at the time was, "Do everything we possibly can to make sure the trends we forecast don't happen!" A number of initiatives by others began with the same desire – such as Back to Church Sunday by the Rt Rev Nigel McCulloch, Bishop of Manchester (2004), Fresh Expressions (formally launched in 2005) and Messy Church (in 2008).

The issues being faced

What were the key issues that church leaders were facing in the 21st century? In all of this the changes being seen in church and society in the UK were broadly parallel to what was happening in Australia. Philip and Peter exchanged the publications that each other's organisation produced and met whenever possible, Philip not infrequently coming to the UK.

Decline. There had been a widespread loss in the number of churchgoers, especially seen among those under 30. Many programmes had attempted to woo them back, but generally they were not as successful as hoped. Part of the problem was how to grapple realistically with some of the tensions young people faced.

Youth habits. These included the great popularity of celebrities and young people's desire to follow them. There was a huge avalanche of information afforded through mobiles, ipads, tablets, and so on and there was increased ease of communicating with each other, especially through the growth of Twitter, Facebook and other like mechanisms. There was an increasing openness to sexuality, with many young people in their teens experimenting with sexual intercourse (often, it was found, out of peer pressure or sheer curiosity), but followed through with many in their 20s cohabiting rather than marrying in the first instance.

Societal change. Society itself was changing rapidly and the church struggled to change with it. Sunday shopping began in 1994 in England, many sports fixtures were increasingly held on a Sunday, schools often held music practice on a Sunday and the concept of a "day of rest" or at least a day with a difference was lost. Cohabitation led to more frequent separation than among people who married, and many families were divided. Research showed that only two-thirds of church children in 2005 lived with their two natural parents, a similar proportion as in society generally.

Values weakened. Some of the major tenets holding society together loosened. Integrity, honesty and uprightness were compromised by many in the public sphere, including politicians, business leaders and media moguls. The general public frequently followed suit. Unfortunately some church leaders were caught up in the same trend. Those standing firmly on the "old" values found it harder to stand firm. In 2003 the Government repealed Section 28 of the 1998 Local Government Act which forbade Local Authorities to promote homosexuality and gradually homosexual activity and publicity increased until in 2013 a law allowing same-sex marriage was passed by the Houses of Parliament. Many conservative Christian leaders considered such was anti-Biblical.

Rural churches. Of the 16,000 Anglican churches in England some 9,000 are located in rural areas, and there are a further 6,000+ rural churches in other denominations, making up two-fifths, 41%, of the total. However, only 10% of the population live in rural areas, although 12% of those who do attend church. But the fact remains that many rural churches have small, often elderly, congregations who are unable realistically to support the ministry of a minister or maintain the fabric of their building. What do senior church leaders, including bishops, do in these circumstances? Some denominations have tried closing many of their churches (especially Methodists and Roman Catholics), with varying success. Anglicans have the additional problem that 90% of their rural churches are "listed", that is, recognised as being

of especial architectural merit and therefore cannot be changed without (often very protracted) discussion. Some ministers look after 12 or more rural churches, while research by Christian Research showed that usually 4 is the maximum that can sensibly be coped with by one person.

Ageing churchgoers. As well as fewer people, many churches have many more older people in their congregation. Often these are more resistant to change, have less energy to do things, and are unwilling to volunteer for roles such as being on the Church Council, or helping with the Sunday School, or general hospitality, etc. The proportion of older people in church congregations is about double the proportion of people of similar age in the population (30% to 16% in 2010 and likely to become 36% to 19% by 2020).

Growing churches. All is not doom and gloom, however, as there are many churches which are growing, especially in south-east England. Over the years 1989 to 2020, some 9,000 churches opened while 8,000 closed. Especially in London, immigrant and black churches are prospering and similar things are happening in Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland and some of the larger English cities. It is these churches which are attracting leaders, while those churches not seeing growth are manned by a decreasing number of ministers, both male and female, which leads to its own problems.

Larger churches. Taken to be those with a Sunday congregation of at least 350, Christian Research held three special week-long "Staff Colleges" in 2003, 2004 and 2006 out of the first of which came the suggestion of a National Larger Anglican Churches' Conference which began in 2005 and has continued every two years since. Many of these churches are growing. Those attending found this was their first training they had received in respect of leading a *larger* church, and also the first time many met each other. Nor did they have to apologise for leading a larger church, which they often did when meeting other church leaders in their locality.

Closure of Christian Research

In November 2006, Peter received a letter from the Group Chief Executive of the Bible Society, James Catford, informing him that the Bible Society would like to take over Christian Research instead of re-starting its own research department (which had been dormant for several years). The Christian Research Board at its next meeting decided this would be a good move, and would resolve the constant worry of inadequate finance for Christian Research's activities. This coincided with the decision of Heather to retire (March 2007), while Peter decided to leave at the end of June 2007, having felt that the personal position offered him by the Bible Society was fraught with difficulties. He began a new organisation, simply called Brierley Consultancy, on a self-employed basis.

The Bible Society published one further edition of the *UKCH* in 2009, now called the *UK Christian Resources' Handbook*, but declined to do more, as the web began to take over. However, the web version of the *UKCH* is nothing like as comprehensive – in 2015 it listed 1,100 organisations whereas the *UKCH* listed over 5,000. In addition the use of the internet meant that the statistics gathered alongside the *Handbook* information, showing how Christian organisations were faring, were felt by the Bible Society to be irrelevant.

Brierley Consultancy

This began in July 2007 and has continued ever since. Initially the Bible Society found that they were unable to continue writing *Quadrant*, so Peter and Heather continued doing this until the end of 2008. However, the Conferences arranged for 2008 were attended by Peter along with his successor at Christian Research, Benita Hewitt. Brierley Consultancy began *FutureFirst* at the beginning of 2009, taking over the role of *Quadrant*, which, while it continued under Bible Society, took a different stand point by reporting more on societal changes than church trends. Peter also began a series called *UK Church Statistics*, which was modelled on *Religious Trends*, which had ceased publication under the Bible Society.

The larger church Conferences, however, have been continued by Brierley Consultancy, now in co-operation with CPAS, an Anglican leadership training and youth agency, and Peter continues to answer numerous questions which arrive constantly by email! The desire for clear, firm information about the church, needed to help leaders in their decision making, and researchers in their projects, has not ended and it is a privilege to help provide that whenever it can be done.

Brierley Consultancy also undertakes research projects, undertaking, for example, a large *Living the Christian Life* study in 2012 for Langham International Partnership, and also in the same year organising the London Church Census at the request of the London City Mission, across London's 4,800 churches. A fourth Scottish Church Census (with 4,100 churches) was undertaken in 2016, so the process of researching continues, augmented by help from others as necessary.

In all of this, parallels with the Christian Research Association in Australia abound. We have a similar set of societal trends, a similar desire for leadership to understand the Christian dimension, and the aim of monitoring the religious influences in that society. The location is different, the culture similar but not identical, but the needs are the same. Long may the work continue, both in the UK, Australia and worldwide!